

VZCZCXRO3485
PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHNP RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHMO #0474/01 0571512
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 261512Z FEB 09
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2138
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 000474

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/25/2019
TAGS: [PREL](#) [EU](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: EUROPEAN COMMISSION TO RUSSIA

REF: MOSCOW 365

Classified By: Political MC Alice G. Wells for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

1. (C) On February 6, EC President Barroso led a delegation of nine EC commissioners and vice presidents for meetings with counterparts in Russia. This visit was part of an intergovernmental framework delayed since 2005, due to a series of crises in the EU-Russia relationship. Human rights was not on the agenda but led to a tense public exchange between Putin and Barroso in front of the press, an exchange built on an interpersonal disconnect. Lavrov promised to build cooperation between the EUMM and Russian forces in South Ossetia, but was negative on the establishment of plenary sessions for future rounds of Geneva talks. Behind closed doors, the GOR called for scrapping the Energy Charter Treaty and replacing it with a new agreement. The GOR assessed that the fact that this visit took place at all meant that Russia-EU relations had normalized since August, and that the political price of the gas crisis was small. End summary.

Back in Business

2. (SBU) On February 6, the European Commission, led by President Jose Manuel Barroso and accompanied by EC Vice Presidents Guenter Verheugen (Enterprise and Industry), Jacques Barrot (Justice, Freedom, and Security), Siim Kallas (Administrative Affairs, Audit, and Anti-Fraud), and Antonio Tajani (Transport) and EC Commissioners Stavros Dimas (Environment), Joaquin Almunia (Economic and Monetary Affairs), Benita Ferrero-Waldner (External Relations and European Neighborhood Policy), Andris Piebalgs (Energy), and Catherine Ashton (Trade), held wide-ranging consultations with the GOR, including meetings with President Medvedev and PM Putin. Much of the discussion at the minister-level covered trade and issues related to the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) negotiations between the EU and Russia (reftel). The meeting between Barroso and Medvedev focused on Georgia and energy security. The EC's visit was memorable for the sharp public exchange between Barroso and Putin on human rights and the rule of law. EC-Russian consultations took place after a four-year delay (since 2005) due to a series of crises. This latest round was to take place in the fall, but was delayed due to the conflict in Georgia. Both sides plan to resume this annual format, as originally intended, with the EC to host at an unannounced time and location next year.

Talks "Positive and Fruitful"

3. (C) In a lunch with the Ambassador on February 9, European Commission Head of Delegation Marc Franco described the Barroso consultations as "positive and fruitful," despite the public fireworks with Putin. Franco attributed Putin's

reaction to the Prime Minister's thin skin when it came to perceptions of criticism. He contrasted Putin's approach to Medvedev, who took the EU's private statement of concern over the assassinations of journalists and human rights activist Markelov on board. Medvedev agreed that Russia was "preoccupied" with the assassinations, and said that he had ordered the investigative agencies to get to the bottom of the killings. Barroso's public remarks, even though there was no direct mention of human rights, elicited steely retorts of hypocrisy and double standards from Putin, who charged that the EU had ignored its member states' treatment of Russian minorities, prisoners, and migrants.

¶4. (C) In a meeting with us February 24, the Head of the MFA's EU Unit Petr Plikhin was similarly upbeat, saying that the EC's visit was a successful "restart of cross-sectoral" dialogues. He dismissed the public spat between Barroso and Putin as press sensationalism and not the focus of the detailed talks. Despite interpersonal differences, Plikhin reflected that with their economies so interdependent, Russia and the EU were "doomed to cooperate."

It's Personal

¶5. (C) The Head of the EC's Mission confirmed the widely known personality disconnect between Putin and Barroso. According to him, the Prime Minister views the EU Commissioner as the "Trojan horse" of the new EU states, whose message that "family is closer than friends" had worn thin in Moscow. Putin's pointed remark that "some institutions should not get in the way of the development of

MOSCOW 00000474 002 OF 002

better Russia-EU relations" was interpreted as a jab at Barroso. The gas war with Ukraine only served to inflame the personal grievance Putin held against the Commissioner, whom he viewed as unfairly assigning disproportionate blame on Russia for the crisis. Without elaborating, Franco noted that it "got personal" during Barroso's meetings with Putin during the gas crisis. While avoiding a direct comment on the Putin-Barroso exchange, Plikhin expressed the cautious hope that the new commission would have a more productive dialogue.

Georgia

¶6. (C) On Georgia, Lavrov promised that a mechanism would be created to establish contact between the EUMM and Russian military, but Franco was uncertain whether the MFA had the power to deliver the Ministry of Defense's participation. Lavrov was equally enthusiastic about the creation of an Incident Prevention Mechanism, but took a stiffer line on the Geneva process.

Energy Security

¶7. (C) Medvedev publicly charged that the Energy Charter Treaty had failed as a mechanism to prevent the recent gas crisis with Ukraine, while in closed-door sessions the GOR called for the treaty to be scrapped. The EU will continue to push hard for Russian ratification, although Franco acknowledged that Russia's real strategy was to renegotiate chit-by-chit its way through the substance of the Charter Treaty. The MFA's Plikhin elaborated that Russia was open to "fixing" the Energy Charter Treaty, but it would prefer to see a new instrument built on the Saint Petersburg Declaration. During the press conference with Barroso, Putin also called for EU monitors to remain in Ukraine for the rest of the first quarter and demanded greater access for Russian monitors. Franco argued that the gas war had a palliative effect on the EU, with member states maintaining a common front against what he described as Putin's "systematic rubbishing" of Ukraine.

Comment

18. (C) The interpersonal conflict between Putin and Barroso aside, the GOR saw the long-delayed visit by the EC as a normalization of EU-Russia relations after the tensions of last August. The MFA was pleased that the gas crisis with Ukraine in January was insufficient enough to derail the planned meeting, an enthusiasm that may have mistakenly led the GOR to conclude that it suffered little political fallout from the crisis.

BEYRLE